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AUTHOR Turner, Walter G.
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ABSTRACT

During the past several years, regional educational service agencies (RESA's) have grown in number and service. Yet very little research has been undertaken to determine what these agencies actually do, how they do what they do, and how well they do what they do. This paper is intended to make a beginning, to answer some questions about RESA's, and to stimulate further research in the name of improved educational cooperation. The discussion covers: (1) cooperative service units: an overview - legislation and governance; (2) regional center: the 1974 study - population and geographic distribution, and financial structure of selected RESA's. Hoping that increased communication and sharing will enable the development of the best possible educational programs for all children, 7 recommendations are submitted, such as having a comprehensive needs assessments conducted by the cooperative service units in all of their member school districts; and exploring and/or developing new programs based on conclusions derived from the needs assessment. (FF)

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EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION:

A NATIONAL STUDY OF REGIONAL UNITS

by

Walter G. Turner, Ed.D.

NORTHERN COLORADO EDUCATIONAL

BOARD OF COOPERATIVE SERVICES

830 South Lincoln

Longmont, Colorado 80501

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EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION:
A NATIONAL STUDY OF REGIONAL UNITS

Introduction

During the past several years, regional educational service agencies (RESA's) have grown in number and service. Yet very little research has been undertaken to determine what these agencies actually do, how they do what they do, and how well they do what they do. What legislation exists in all 50 states? How are the units governed? What type of fiscal support do they have? What programs do they offer? Are they effective?

We in Colorado have been asked these questions many times by our legislature, the State Board of Education, and local school districts. While this paper will not answer all of these questions, it is intended to make a beginning, to answer some of the questions, and to stimulate further research in the name of improved educational cooperation.

COOPERATIVE SERVICE UNITS: AN OVERVIEW

State school systems have three basic organizational patterns: one-echelon, where all control belongs to the state education agency; two-echelon, involving the state education agency and the local education agency; and three-echelon, involving the state education agency, some intermediate agency, and the local education agency. Only Hawaii has a one-echelon system; seventeen states have a two-echelon system; and the remaining 32 states have a three-echelon system.

One-echelon:	Hawaii
Two-echelon:	Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia
Three-echelon:	California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming

Historically, the intermediate agency has been the county, which has performed regulatory and administrative functions for the state. However, in recent years, especially since the mid-1960's, intermediate units in several states have become increasingly service oriented. In some of these states the single county is still the organizational unit; in others, the county unit has been abolished in favor of a new intermediate unit, the regional educational service agency (RESA).

In addition, many states have developed single and/or multi-purpose regional cooperatives on a voluntary basis. Although these units cannot be classified as intermediate units, their service function is basically the same: to provide services which single districts could not

TABLE A

COOPERATIVE SERVICE UNITS

January, 1974

	County Unit	Supervisory Union	RESA	Multi-Purpose Cooperative	Single-Purpose Cooperative	No Information
Alabama				X		
Alaska						X
Arizona	X					
Arkansas	X					
California	X					
Colorado	X		X			
Connecticut		X		X		
Delaware					X	
Florida				X	X	
Georgia			X			
Hawaii						X
Idaho				X	X	
Illinois	X				X	
Indiana	X			X	X	
Iowa	X		X		X	
Kansas					X	
Kentucky				X	X	
Louisiana						X
Maine		X				
Maryland				X		
Massachusetts		X			X	
Michigan			X		X	
Minnesota	X				X	
Mississippi	X			X		
Missouri	X			X	X	
Montana	X				X	
Nebraska	X		X			
Nevada					X	
New Hampshire		X				
New Jersey	X			X	X	
New Mexico				X	X	
New York		X	X	X	X	
North Carolina				X	X	
North Dakota	X				X	
Ohio	X			X	X	
Oklahoma	X					
Oregon	X				X	
Pennsylvania			X		X	
Rhode Island						X
South Carolina	X			X		
South Dakota	X					
Tennessee				X	X	
Texas	X		X			
Utah					X	
Vermont		X				
Virginia				X		
Washington			X			
West Virginia			X		X	
Wisconsin			X		X	
Wyoming			X		X	

SOURCE: Compiled from Hooker & Mueller, 1970; Hughes, Achilles, Leonard & Spence, 1971; Stephens, 1973; journal articles; and State Department brochures.

possibly provide on an individual basis. Each of the 32 three-echelon states has some form of regional educational cooperation. (See TABLE A.)

It is important to note that while TABLE A classifies all but four states as having some type of cooperative service unit, total information was not available from all states. It is therefore possible that additional units exist in some states.

Legislation

In 1965, Federal legislation openly encouraged educational cooperation through the Higher Education Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). That same year, two states (Nebraska and Wisconsin) passed legislation that mandated intermediate units, and four others (Colorado, Iowa, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) passed legislation enabling increased cooperation between districts. Prior to 1965, only Michigan and New York had active, service-oriented intermediate units (Stephens, 1973: pp. 60-1, 65-6).

As of January, 1974, at least 16 states have active RESA's. Six of these operate under legislative mandate: Georgia, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin; six operate under enabling legislation: Colorado, Iowa, Michigan, New York, West Virginia, and Wyoming; four states: California, Illinois, Ohio, and Oregon, have recently strengthened the service role of their county units. Nine additional states have "taken significant action" both with and without legislation: Connecticut and these members of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC): Alabama, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (Stephens, 1973: p. 25).

TABLE B

LEGISLATION

January, 1974

	Mandated (RESA's)	Permissive (RESA's)	Strengthened (County Units)	Permissive (Cooperatives)	No Legislation (Cooperatives)	Legislative Study	Permissive (Inactive)	No Legislation	Negative Legislation	No Information
Alabama					X					
Alaska							X			
Arizona								X		
Arkansas								X		
California			X							
Colorado		X								
Connecticut				X						
Delaware								X		
Florida							X			
Georgia	X									
Hawaii								X		
Idaho						X	X			
Illinois			X							
Indiana							X			
Iowa		X								
Kansas						X		X		
Kentucky				X						
Louisiana							X			
Maine										X
Maryland					X					
Massachusetts *							X			
Michigan		X								
Minnesota						X	X			
Mississippi				X						
Missouri						X			X	
Montana							X			
Nebraska	X									
Nevada										X
New Hampshire *							X			
New Jersey							X			
New Mexico								X		
New York		X								
North Carolina					X					
North Dakota						X	X			
Ohio			X							
Oklahoma						X		X		
Oregon			X							
Pennsylvania	X									
Rhode Island										X
South Carolina					X					
South Dakota						X	X			
Tennessee				X						
Texas	X									
Utah							X			
Vermont *							X			
Virginia					X					
Washington	X									
West Virginia		X								
Wisconsin	X									
Wyoming		X								
	6	6	4	4	5	(7)	14	7	1	3

* These states operate under a supervisory union.

Another seven states: Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and South Dakota, have studied the concept of regional cooperation without taking formal action (Stephens, 1973: p. 97). Still another 10 states already have permissive legislation should they decide to form cooperative units. (See TABLE B.)

Recent enacted and attempted legislation indicates a growing interest in either developing new or strengthening existing intermediate units. A report to the 1971 California legislature ("Intermediate Unit," 1971: p. 2) recommended the abolishment of the county unit in favor of RESA's; a similar bill was submitted to the Iowa legislature in 1972. That same year, Nebraska introduced a bill that would have all counties included in an educational service unit; and Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, and New York enacted legislation to increase their cooperative capabilities ("1972 Legislation," 1973). In 1973, the New Mexico legislature tried to pass a bill that would enable service sharing between districts ("School District Reorganization," 1973). And in Ohio, bills to establish educational service districts will be re-introduced to the 1974 legislature (Quick, 1973).

While legislative support for cooperative service units appears to be on the increase, there is no clear indication of the extent to which legislation effects the structure or operation of existing units.

Governance

Regional units are generally governed by a board of control. The method of selecting a board of control varies from state to state. Three commonly used methods include popular election, election by a

convention of members of the boards of local school districts, and appointment by the boards of education of local school districts (Stephens, 1973: pp. 60-1, 65-6).

There is also considerable variance in the size of the governing boards, although generally each member school district has at least one representative on the board of control. Some states specify that only one or two members from each participating school district may be elected or appointed. This system could pose problems for units having different size districts. It has been recommended that membership be determined by the size of the district. (Hughes et al, 1971: p. 53)

The chief administrator of existing RESA's is appointed by the governing board, and in New York, the administrator must be a state official and approved by the state board of education (Stephens, 1973: p. 67).

It is apparent that many RESA's perform some regulatory and administrative functions for the state department of education and that regional units in most states have some association with that agency. However, the strength of that relationship differs significantly from state to state (Stephens, 1973: p. 62; Hughes et al, 1971: p. 53).

REGIONAL CENTERS: THE 1974 STUDY

A new study was recently conducted of multi-purpose regional centers in 14 states. Incorporating a wide range of responses from different states, to date 122 out of 389, or 31%, of the units contacted have responded to some part of the questionnaire.

Areas covered by the questionnaire include population served, geographic distribution, programs and services offered, and fiscal information. While the study does not include all cooperative service units in all states, it does include some information from all of the states with legislative mandates: Georgia, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin; half of the states with active RESA's and permissive legislation: Colorado, Michigan, and New York; three of the four states with strengthened service roles: California, Ohio, and Oregon; and two states with multi-purpose cooperatives: Indiana and New Jersey. (Hereafter this study will be referred to as "the 1974 study.")

Population and Geographic Distribution: Effects on Programming

The 1974 study asked regional centers to state the population (number of students served) and the geographic distribution (metro, urban, rural) of the areas they serve. The questionnaires were divided into four categories according to the number of students served; geographic distribution was then determined for each category:

Students Served	Units Responding	Metro	Urban	Rural
1) under 20,000	53 (44%)	2%	8%	90%
2) 20,000-50,000	32 (26%)	7%	22%	71%
3) 50,000-100,000	22 (18%)	20%	27%	53%
4) over 100,000	14 (11%)	46%	29%	25%
Totals	121 (31%)	12%	18%	70%

As might be expected, as the number of students served increases, the units become increasingly urban and metropolitan and decreasingly rural. However, only when the student population is over 100,000 do the units become primarily metropolitan. Even the third group (50,000 to 100,000) is mostly rural and more urban than metro. (Also, of the 14 states studied, centers in only three states: Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania, are more metro than urban.)

Population and Programming

Information regarding operational programs was requested in the following format:

	Product Development	Graphic Production	Planning	Evaluation	In-Service Training	Teacher Aid Program	Testing	Information Dissemination	Materials Selection	Demonstration Center	Consultant Service	Mobile Unit Service	Others			
Remedial Reading																
Science																
Environmental Education																
Special Education																
Vocational Education																
Adult Education																
Distributive Education																
Migrant Education																
Art/Humanities																
Bilingual Education																
Early Childhood Education																
Career Education																
Others																

The following programs and services were the most frequently cited by all units in each of the four population categories:

Programs	Services
Special Education	In-service Training
Remedial Reading	Consultant Services
Career Education	Planning
Vocational Education	Evaluation
	Materials Selection
	Information Dissemination

In all but the lowest population group, Early Childhood Education, Environmental Education, and Science were also frequently cited.

The effect of population on programming can only be seen in the first and last groups, those with the least and the most population. In the first group, under 20,000, approximately half of the units reported only four programs or less. In the fourth group, over 100,000, significantly more programs were offered through more services. Even though only 14 units are included in this latter group, every category of programs and services was checked, most of them by at least half of the responding units.

Geographic Distribution and Programming

Samples of units that are predominantly (50% or better) rural, urban, or metropolitan were studied to determine if geographic distribution effects programming. The study revealed that all programs and services are available in some center in each of the three geographic divisions. Rural units reported 50% or better participation in four programs and six services. Urban units reported better than 50% participation in five programs and eight services. Metropolitan units reported 100%

participation in three programs and six services and better than 50% participation in all but two programs and five services.

These figures do not indicate radical program differences based on geographic distribution. However, program participation does increase some from rural to urban to metropolitan areas; and this increase relates directly to the increase of student population. In other words, there appears to be a direct correlation between population, geographic distribution, and programming. The smaller units, which are generally rural, have fewer operational programs; the larger units, which are generally urban to metro, have larger programs. (It should be noted that this study provided a limited sample of urban and metro units.)

Financial Structure of Selected RESA's

While it has been generally known that RESA's receive monies from a combination of local, state, and federal sources, the 1974 study provides a clearer picture of the financing pattern in 11 states: Colorado, California, Georgia, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. One hundred and eight regional cooperative units, representing 29 per cent of the possible responses from these states, provided fiscal information for the study. It is important to stress that this analysis of funding is only representative of the responding regional centers and may not provide an accurate profile of some states. State responses varied from 17% to 69%. (See TABLE C.)

Federal Support

This survey makes it immediately apparent that units in these 11 states receive limited federal funds. Only one state, Colorado (57% response), receives more than one-third of its support from federal programs. This includes three Boards of Cooperative Services that receive at least 50% of their total support from federal monies. Two other states, Texas and Washington (40% and 29% responding), receive between 20 and 30 per cent of their total support from federal funds. The remaining eight states indicated that less than 15% of their budgets come from federal programs. Only four of these 108 RESA units receive more than 50% federal funds. While ESEA Titles I and II supply some of these monies, Titles III and VI were more frequently cited as the primary source of federal funds. Federal funds account for 12% of the total support of the eleven states.

TABLE C

FINANCIAL STRUCTURE

January, 1974

	Total No. of Units	No. of Responding Units	Percentage of Responding Units	Local Support	State Support	Federal Support	Other	Tax Levy Power	Title To Property	Required Budget Review
California	52	10	19%	45%	42%	13%				
Colorado	14	8	57	28	29	34	9%		X	
Georgia	16	11	69	27	64	9				
Iowa								X		
Michigan	59	11	19	49*	43	8		X		
Nebraska								X	X	
New York	44	16	36	53	41	6			X	X
North Dakota								X		
Ohio	77	22	29	47*	45	8		X		
Oregon	29	5	17	91*	8	1		X		
Pennsylvania	29	10	34	40	51	9			X	X
South Dakota								X		
Tennessee								X	X	
Texas	20	8	40	34	45	21			X	X
Washington	14	4	29	40*	31	29				X
West Virginia								X		
Wisconsin	18	3	17	45	45	10				X
Wyoming									X	
	372	108	29%	44%	43%	12%	.6%	9	7	5

SOURCE: Compiled from the 1974 Study; Hooker & Mueller, 1970; Hughes et al, 1971; Stephens, 1973.

*Includes county & other "local" funds.

State Support

Eight of the 11 states reported that over one-third of their total funding came from state sources. States operating under legislative mandate generally receive most of their funds from the state: Georgia and Pennsylvania receive over half; Texas and Wisconsin receive 45%; Washington is an exception, receiving most of its monies from local--including county--sources. Only one state, Oregon, reported almost no (8%) state support. State funds account for 43% of the total support of the 108 RESA's, just 1% less than what local districts supply.

Local Support

Funds from local sources include both direct support and contract services from member districts and, for four states: Michigan, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington, include tax revenues and county funds as local sources. Oregon (17% response) is the only state that receives nearly all (91%) of its support from local sources. New York is the only other state to report a total of more than 50% local funding. However, six more states: California, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Washington, and Wisconsin, receive more than one-third of their total support from local sources. Local funds account for 44% of the total support of the 108 RESA's with direct support slightly more common than service contracts. Local school districts require an annual budget review in New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin (Stephens, 1973: pp. 61, 66).

Taxation and Property Titles

Michigan, Ohio, and Oregon can levy taxes to support cooperative ventures. RESA's in Iowa, Nebraska, and West Virginia, and educational cooperatives in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Tennessee also have tax levying powers. Educational cooperatives in Colorado, Nebraska, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, and Wyoming may hold title to real property.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Information has been gathered, charts have been developed, and trends have been defined. Patterns of legislating, governing, financing, and programming regional educational service agencies can now be more clearly seen and understood. This information is valuable, but it does not go far enough. While it is relatively easy to determine quantity, it is far more difficult to determine quality. Now it is time to ask the crucial question: "DOES EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION REALLY WORK?"

While evaluative studies have been conducted in a number of individual centers in several states, it is clear that there are few vehicles for sharing such studies with other centers in other states. Therefore the following recommendations are submitted:

1) that comprehensive needs assessments be conducted by the cooperative service units in all of their member school districts;

2) that new programs be explored and/or developed based on conclusions derived from the needs assessment;

3) that every center conduct on-going evaluations of operational programs and services to insure that assessed needs are being met;

4) that programs not meeting assessed needs be improved or terminated per recommendation of the evaluation team;

5) that training programs be developed and conducted for personnel in member school districts for the purposes of furthering knowledge and use of available resources;

6) that continuing efforts be made to determine and improve the overall effectiveness of cooperative service agencies; and, finally,

7) that a national communication system or clearing house be

developed for the express purpose of disseminating such information to all interested persons.

These recommendations are submitted in the hope that increased communication and sharing will enable the development of the best possible educational programs for all children.

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